

COLOMBIAN STRATEGIES AND OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS USED IN  
TODAY'S COUNTERTERRORISM WARFARE

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by

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## ABSTRACT

COLOMBIAN STRATEGIES AND OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS USED IN TODAY'S COUNTERTERRORISM WARFARE, by LTC Juan Carlos Correa, 88 pages.

Colombia has been involved in an internal conflict since 1949. The assassination of the political leader, Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, initiated a violent era between the traditional political parties. In 1964, the first guerrilla movement would officially establish under the name of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. FARC, a Marxist-Leninist communist movement would influence the destiny of the country. Other communist armed movements such as the National Liberation Army would emerge later. In 1994, a new armed movement called the United Self defense of Colombia would begin. This was a group that was created by part of the population to protect themselves from the guerrilla's kidnappings and extortions, but later became illegal because of the use of illegitimate force and drug trafficking.

The illegal groups that initially were established as insurgent guerrillas or self defense organizations soon became narco terrorist organizations. They began using indiscriminate terrorist attacks not only against military forces but against the population and the infrastructure. Today those illegal groups finance their activities with drug production and trafficking worldwide. Together Colombian President, Alvaro Uribe Velez, the military and the police forces have been implementing strategies and operational concepts that have dramatically influenced the internal conflict. Even though terrorist threats have not been neutralized, it has diminished. Terrorist key leaders have been killed in combat and their armed capability is no longer as big of a threat to Colombian democracy. These strategies and operational concepts might be employed by different armies with similar threats to their terrorist threat.

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## ACRONYMS

AUC	Colombian United Self defense (For its translation to Spanish)
CNC	National Farmers Commission
CNE	National Students Commission
CNO	National Workers Commission
CNP	National Politics Commission
ELN	National Liberation Army (For its translation to Spanish)
FARC-EP	Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces – People’s Army (For its translation to Spanish)
FUCAD	Joint Decisive Action Force (For its translation to Spanish)
FUDRA	Quick Deployment Force (For its translation to Spanish)
ONT	Narco Terrorist Organization (For its translation to Spanish)
PCSD	Democratic Security Consolidation Policy (2006-2010)
PSD	Democratic Security Defense Policy (2002-2006)
PMESII-PT	Variables political, military, economic, social, information, and infrastructure, physical environment and time



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Those who fail to study history are doomed to repeat it.  
— George Santiyana

The death of six Canadian soldiers in southern Afghanistan reminds us of the famous maxim quoted above. The soldiers were killed near Maiwand on July 27, 1880, during the bloody Second Anglo-Afghan War, where the British Empire suffered one of the worst defeats in its colonial history (Margolis 2007). This quote reinforces the importance of studying and, where applicable, employing the experiences acquired through the history of different armies and governments. It is with this perspective in mind that this thesis becomes relevant. For international forces involved in counter-insurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Colombian Army's 50 years of hard gained experience fighting a network of subversives, terrorists and narco-traffickers may provide useful insights into operational design and strategy that can be leveraged to achieve the momentum necessary for ultimate victory.

This thesis is an exploratory study of Colombia's internal conflict between the Colombian government and the different narco terrorist groups. It will explore, concurrently and in parallel, the Colombian Army's and the narco-terrorists' organizations organizational and strategic development over the last 50 years. This thesis is not an in depth analysis of each one of the elements of the current conflict in Colombia. It is, however, a general description of the main elements that influence the conflict in order to identify and analyze several operational variables that have been important in shaping the current operational situation. Much of the background material and analysis is

experimentally based on over 20 years of experience by the author prosecuting special operations against Colombian subversive groups, like the FARC, ELN, and narco - traffickers. The final objective of this thesis is to provide a set of conclusions and recommendations that may assist future readers in developing appropriate strategies and operational frameworks for similar campaigns.

### Background

Colombia has been involved in an internal conflict since 1948 after the assassination of the populist movement leader, Jorge Eliecer Gaitan. Mr. Gaitan was a former education minister, labor minister, Mayor of Bogota and chief of the Colombian liberal party. After his assassination, the two radical political parties, liberals and conservatives, began a bloody struggle that grew exponentially. This struggle and the influence of international communism at the time were the main reasons why the insurgent movements' developed in Colombia. Specifically, Russia and Cuba supported these movements, and used them to spread their ideology using the false pretense of fighting for Colombia's lower economic class. As depicted in the FARC-EP's strategy manual, one of the objectives of the initial phases of an insurgent movement is to politically agitate poor classes by showing the farmers and low income workers that they have been exploited by the elites and traditional political parties (FARC 1990). In Colombia, many groups emerged as insurgents and revolutionaries with similar ideals but different leadership and influence. The most well-known leftists groups are the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP) and the National Liberation Army (ELN). From the political right-wing emerged the United Self defense of Colombia (AUC for its translation to Spanish). After

the end of the Cold War and broad external financing, all of these groups were forced to look for new sources of financing devolving them into criminal organizations.

In the late 1980s, the guerrilla movements began delving into drug trafficking and kidnapping to finance their movements, gradually shedding their ideology and becoming narco terrorist organizations. The Colombian Army has been fighting them with different tactics and techniques throughout the years. Today, leveraging President Alvaro Uribe Velez's strategic vision coupled with improved operational capabilities and concepts, the army is achieving the momentum necessary to achieve victory on the battlefield. For the first time in the conflict's history, Colombian military forces have been able to neutralize key members of the FARC-EP's secretariat, the highest political cell in the organization. These are men who for decades had achieved myth-like reputations based on their charisma and ability to elude capture. As an example, on February 29 2008, Raul Reyes was killed in a joint operation (C. M. Defense 2009). He was the second-in-command in the FARC structure, a permanent member of its secretariat. Raul Reyes was also in charge of the international diplomacy with other governments and organizations. That's why this operation constituted one of the best operations at a strategic level.

In order to be able to understand the narco terrorist groups that threaten Colombia in this current struggle and compare them to other operational scenarios, it is necessary to understand their history, development and organization. The history helps one understand the roots of each group, identifying motivations to begin and carry-on the insurgent movement. A summary of the development of these groups through the decades assists in identifying how these subversive elements have been adapting according to different factors such as new army capabilities, advanced technology, and changes in support.

Defining the make-up of the organization is important in understanding how these elements operate to achieve their objectives.

### Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC-EP)

#### History

The history of the FARC begins in 1948 after the assassination of the popular leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitan. As a result of this assassination, the Colombian communist party exploited the ensuing political crisis between the two main political parties, the liberal and the conservatives. The communist party organized the farmers as the main body of armed resistance. On June 13, 1953, Colombian President Gustavo Rojas Pinilla authorized an armistice allowing those insurgents who surrendered to re-integrate into society without punishment. Not all insurgents surrendered and the ones that remained in the insurgent movement moved to Villarica, Cundinamarca, which is south of Colombia, to establish an armed resistance movement.

Because of the actions of the Colombian Armed Forces, the insurgents deployed to the rural areas of Marquetalia, Guayabero and Rio Chiquito. There they began to mobilize the population, especially farmers, to join the organization. In January 1960, the communist party established the self-defense movement of Marquetalia. organized and trained movement for armed resistance After establishing the self-defense movement, they proclaimed the “Independent Republic of Marquetalia”.

#### Development

The FARC-EP political and military policies and goals were formed in their national conferences and meetings. These conferences gathered key leaders who

established short, medium and long term objectives. One of the most important meetings was held in La Uribe Meta on May 10 1989. During this meeting, these key members established the strategic plan called the “Bolivarian campaign for a new Colombia”. The campaign objective was to politically take over Colombia in eight years. In order to achieve this objective, the FARC-EP had to meet some intermittent goals. They included raising large insurgent army composed of 80 fronts with strength of 32,000 men and to raise \$200 million dollars to support their activities. Once these goals were met, the FARC would launch its first general offensive; if it failed, they would deploy to a defensive position and prepare for subsequent offensives. The FARC estimated that it would take eight years to achieve those objectives, and they did not achieve them.

Their last conference was held in southern Colombia on December 2002. In this conference, they established new priorities to face the Colombian Armed Forces. They ordered the armed fronts to conduct small unit military actions only. They established that neither the non government organizations (NGOs) nor the International Red Cross may go inside their areas unless there was an infiltrated friend among them. They established the infrastructure as one of the key military objectives. If they destroy the economic targets and the key infrastructure, they believed that they could force the Colombian government to expend financial resources on reconstruction rather than security operations, weakening the government’s ability to respond to the on-slaught. Finally, the insurgents realized the need to excerpt strong discipline over their membership adopting draconian measures like summary executions and forced birth control measures. The intent was to ensure compliance and loyalty to the cause and the leadership.

The FARC was and remains the most influential terrorist group in Colombia. It bases its strength on the power and influence derived from drug trafficking income. The organization has lost almost all national and international support primarily because of the methods they are currently employing in the conflict. The FARC-EP has committed terrorist actions not only against the military forces but also against the civilian population. As noted in history of these types of struggles, terrorist attacks are methods of a weak insurgent group unable to conventionally fight the security forces of the governing authority. Terrorism, however, is noted as a weapon of warfare, which can neither be ignored nor minimized (Trinquier 1961, 16). This weapon is used to force population against the government. Also is used to intimidate the population in order to minimize the influence of military forces to obtain intelligence and support. One of the most recent terrorist actions was the massacre of ten native Indians in southern Colombia. At the beginning, the FARC denied the incident, but when there was no other alternative, they accepted and stated that they did it because the Indians were supporting the Army operations in the area. Several national and international organizations repudiated this action as it constituted a deliberate human rights violation.

Economically, this terrorist group uses diverse methods of financing. The primary means of economic sustainment is tied to drug production and trafficking. Other methods of financing are the kidnapping, extortion, assault of government financial institutions and voluntary contributions from left-wing organizations worldwide. The FARC-EP, as well as many others insurgent movements, has based its development and actions according to Mao Tse Tung's phases of the protracted popular warfare (PPW) (FARC 1990). These phases have been modified from Mao's original model. In Mao's theory of protracted war, he

outlined a three-phased, politic-military approach: the strategic defensive, the strategic stalemate and the strategic counteroffensive (FM 3-24 2006, 18). The FARC's modified strategic framework established four phases in order to overthrow the existing government and establish a revolutionary government. It is important to analyze each of this phases according to the FARC-EP strategy to achieve the power. This strategy is outlined in documents developed at different FARC-EP conferences and later on captured in different military operations.

The first phase of the FARC-EP is called the strategic defense and implantation. Implantation is initiated by the creation of guerrilla cells usually in isolated or distant rural areas. The purpose of these guerrilla cells is to project the areas as strategic defensive positions. In these areas, terrorists create shadow governments to win population support. This phase has a tactical offense, but remains a strategic defense because the government is strong and the terrorist group is weak. The phase was developed during the first six FARC-EP conferences between 1964 and 1982. During the first phase, the basic tactic employed by terrorist groups is guerrilla warfare. Guerrilla warfare is fought with small numbers of combatants and focuses their activities on harassing and ambushing regular forces, assaulting rural areas to isolate populations, as well as, kidnapping and extortion of the civilian populace. This phase helps the subversive elements win population compliance through a mixture of fear and political mobilization.

The second phase is called the "strategic balance of forces". This phase is regarded as an operational defensive and offensive. The second phase's basic tactic is the movement war. This phase was developed in FARC-EP's seventh conference in 1982 and included in the strategic plan. The concepts behind this plan are similar to the theory offered by Liu



Shao-ch'I for the revolution in China and colonial countries. It establishes that the first step to a revolution victory is to unite the working class and all other classes under the leading of a communist party (Galula 2005, 43). During this phase, the intent is to combine both guerrilla warfare with a war of maneuver or movement. The insurgents operate as independent small guerrilla groups looking to identify vulnerable targets. Once these targets are identified, different guerrillas groups are united from a region under a common leader and attempt to seize the objective. If and when the target is successfully attacked, the assault group breaks apart again into small guerrilla bands and disperses before reinforcements arrive and re-exert influence. According to the seventh conference, the success of this new tactic depended on the ability to keep government forces from identifying indicators that this tactic and phase was being employed. If the military and police forces could be kept off balance thinking they were facing just small guerrilla elements, the insurgents would use platoons or companies to conduct operations. The Army and police forces would be trained and equipped only to face the first phase (guerrilla warfare) threat. It means that they will be preparing to fight small elements rather than bigger guerrilla units. When they, Army and police forces, faced a second phase (movement warfare), they would be tactically surprised placing them in vulnerable position to be defeated.

Besides the military portion of this second phase, there are political, social and economic components that complement it. They include protests in the rural and urban areas to disperse combat power at various locations. The militias began to influence the politics in each town in order to obtain support. This political support had the objective to misplace government funds to support the economy of the organization and to develop

judicial warfare against military personnel. The overall intent was to develop a strong organization, both militarily and political, that could confront Colombian Army forces in preparation for Phase III operations.

The third phase of the campaign is called “general offensive and power achievement”. This phase is characterized by the development of numerically superior insurgent forces. It bases operations on the tactical offensive and employs positional warfare as the main tactic. The terrorist organization employs a combination of techniques integrating conventional warfare tactics, guerrilla warfare, movement warfare and the positional warfare. This phase will be also supported by social, political and economic lines of operation. To control this phase, the adversary, would install a central command and control node in a given location. This command and control node is established with the purpose to centralize the leadership and coordinate all actions in support of a general offensive. This general offensive would be executed through simultaneous attacks against all military and police units in the target area. At the same time, the terrorists that are able to get to the capital cities would integrate with the clandestine Colombian political party and unions to agitate large demonstrations nationwide. Once able to achieve these conditions, the final offensive would begin. In this phase, the insurgents actively seek international recognition. These organizations attempt to establish links that will provide political cover and economic assistance. The objective in this phase is to establish a new provisional government led by influential intellectuals that have been drawn to the insurgent movement. If this phase is successfully achieved, the subversive organization transitions to fourth phase.

The fourth phase is called “revolutionary defense”. The main objective is to consolidate power and develop a socialist government backed by a revolutionary popular army. This phase was established to have three different variables in the Colombian conflict depending on the outcome. The first variable occurred if after conducting the prior phases, the FARC-EP had defeated the Colombian Army and they are not capable of conducting operations. If this happens and the FARC-EP had international support, then they would begin their general offensive to take power nationwide and establish a revolutionary government. This general offensive would initially isolate capital cities and military units to establish territory control. Once they have the control of the territory and the security forces, they assume the country’s leadership. The second variable is determined if the government accepts the prisoner exchange. This will consist of exchanging government and civilians kidnapped by the FARC-EP for members captured by security forces for various crimes. By accepting this “prisoner exchange”, the FARC-EP was attempting to attain recognition as a legitimate military belligerent. With this status, the FARC-EP attempts to get international recognition and establish a new state under their governance. This situation would initiate the dissolution of the Colombian state and a victory for this organization’s goals. The third option would take place if the FARC-EP could not achieve the prior objectives of prisoner’s exchange and zones liberation. They would try to co-govern the national territory imposing by force their ideals on government appointed leaders or replacing them with sympathizers. Since local leadership is selected by popular election, the objective is to influence the population to vote for those candidates that will support the insurgent movement. Once they have established political power in more than fifty percent of the Colombian territory, they would have the needed political power to

compete against the traditional political parties and bring an alternative form of national governance. This new political group would support the armed struggle. Thus, the insurgent movement would be able to achieve their ultimate goal of replacing the constitutional government.

It is important to understand the dimension of the power this terrorist group achieved in the late 1990s. They were able to move from the first to the second phase of campaign and in some areas they tried without success to get to the third phase. In order to highlight the criticality of the transition into phase two operations, some case studies are described below.

#### Las Delicias Terrorist Attack

One of the most famous demonstrations that the FARC-EP executed to show their new capabilities and strategies was the attack on an army counter guerrilla company in August 1996. The terrorists began to plan this attack on December 17, 1995. On this date, the 14th front commander sent two terrorists to work in a farm that belonged to a FARC-EP support network member known as “Esteban”; all of them dressed as civilian population. The farm was located north of the military base and was used to conduct initial reconnaissance missions on the troops. At the same time, another terrorist known as “Camilo” began an infiltration operations via the base commander. . In order to gain the base commander’s confidence, “Camilo”, an experienced fisherman, began to go fishing with the base commander. During the long periods of fishing and after gaining the confidence of the commander, “Camilo” gathered all the information related to the defense plan and crucial weapons locations on the base. Alongside this intelligence operation, the

terrorists also brought some other terrorists acting as farmers to sell their products. The base commander organized sport events between the supposed farmers and the soldiers; this gave them the opportunity to complete a detailed reconnaissance of the base and its security.

On July 1996, the FARC-EP, with all the information gathered, built a base mockup not far from the actual base and began the final planning and rehearsal of this attack. While the FARC-EP was planning this attack, the army conducted a unit rotation in the base. On August 26, the unit, which had been there for more than six months, was sent to conduct offensive operations while a new unit was brought in order to rest and re-fit. The initial days of the turn-over were dedicated exclusively for health assessments and equipment maintenance. Active security measures were not employed per standard operating procedure.

On August 30, just four days after the new unit arrived, at two o'clock in the afternoon some soldiers were playing a soccer match against a local civilian team and at five o'clock on the same day, the supplies arrived. At that time and without noticing it, the terrorists were already very close to the trench lines. At seven o'clock, a soldier on guard saw a terrorist and alerted the base of his presence. Because of the knowledge of the objective, the terrorist groups began the attack initially against key defensive positions and crucial weapon systems. The attack had duration of approximately 17 hours. The communication system was not adequate and as a result, the unit was not able to ask for and receive air support. The attack left a tragic result of 31 dead soldiers, 17 wounded and 60 kidnapped.

This case study shows the capability that the FARC-EP had achieved at this time. They were not fighting guerrilla warfare anymore; they were concentrating elements to conduct large scale operations against vulnerable targets. At the same time, it became evident that military forces lacked the capacity to generate intelligence at all levels in order to detect and prevent this large concentration of terrorist forces. This attack displayed the transition and focus of operations from first to the second phase of protracted popular warfare (PPW). Another case study that is important to analyze is the attack on the city of Mitu. This attack shows the intent of the FARC-EP to move on to the third phase of their campaign launching a general offensive while trying to control a specific zone of Colombian territory.

#### Mitu Terrorist Attack

On August 2, 1998, the FARC-EP attacked and occupied for several hours the city of Mitu. The FARC considered this attack a critical strategic action for the terrorist group because Mitu is in the Vaupés Department (equivalent to a US state) capital located 356 miles southeast of the Colombian capital city, Bogota. This was one of the most important actions of a terrorist group against Colombia and its military forces. This attack is also important because it depicted a strategic objective of this movement to continue the peace negotiations with President Andres Pastrana, but under terrorist activity. This attack was conducted by almost 1500 terrorists of the FARC-EP organization. Around two o'clock in the morning on that Sunday began the assault that left the tragic result of 16 policemen assassinated, 38 wounded and 65 kidnapped.

Different than the previous case summary was that this time military forces were prepared, equipped and trained for these events. Initially the Air Force provided air support where possible because the attack was on the police station located in the urban area of the capital city and it was surrounded by the city's population hiding inside their homes. Besides air support, the air force provided military forces that required intelligence to plan the operation to recover the city. This operation was executed by 100 special forces soldiers that were inserted about 100 miles away from the city because the terrorists had covered the surrounding areas with mine fields and ambushes to blunt the expected military reaction. During this operation, 14 soldiers died but they accomplished the mission of recovering the capital city. During this attack, according to military intelligence and the terrorists who deserted from the FARC-EP organization, military and/or police forces killed around 800 terrorists.

### ELN

#### History

The victory of Fidel Castro's Cuba revolution in 1959 brought a liberation doctrine in Latin-America. In 1962, Colombian university students began receiving scholarships from the Cuban government. Some of these students received military training political indoctrination. Upon their return to Colombia, they founded the Jose Antonio Galan Brigade. In 1964, they founded the guerrilla movement in San Vicente del Chuquiri, Colombia. On January 07 1965, they executed their first military action against a police station in Simacota Santander as the new National Liberation Army (ELN) (Fabio Sanchez, Ana Maria Diaz, Michel Formisano 2003).

The ELN was developed under a Marxism- Leninist ideology. They declared as their objectives the rise of power of the popular masses, the defeat of the perceived political oligarchy, and the destruction of the Colombian armed forces as the protectors of this oligarchy and the embodiment of the imperialist influence of the United States (Medina 2001).

### Development

In 1965, the terrorist group ELN had a rural front and three urban cells in Barrancabermeja, Bucaramanga and Bogota. In 1972, they had grown to three rural fronts; but in 1973, the Colombian Army conducted operation “Anori” that ended up killing the main leaders of this group and the displacement of the principal leader and founder, Fabio Vasquez Castaño (Martinez 2006, 171). Nicolas Rodriguez Bautista emerged as the new leader. This terrorist organization was and remains weak militarily. There are a few large operations they conducted against the military and police forces. Their kinetic activities were focused on the employment of improvised explosive devices and the destruction of the oil pipeline infrastructure in the eastern region of Colombia. The objective of conducting these indiscriminate terrorist attacks was to lower national oil profits and enable the extortion of national and international oil companies.

In terms of political involvement, this narco terrorist group has long history. In 1986, this terrorist group, according to its “first congress”, supported a new organization called the “Simon Bolivar Guerrilla Coordinating Body”. This organization influenced the narco terrorist groups from 1987 to 1990. It united the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the 19<sup>th</sup> of April Movement, the National Liberation Army, and the Popular



Liberation Army. In its “second congress” they defined their political goals. They wanted to achieve control of the town by supporting a political candidate to win the popular major’s election that was banned in Colombia in 1989.

Between 1991 and 1992, they participated in peace negotiations with the Colombian government in Mexico and Venezuela without any positive outcome. In 1997, the ELN had its “third congress”. In this congress, they confirmed their objective of attaining political power through the use of force while trying to negotiate with the government. Their strategy to gain the power in Colombia remains based on the principles of the Protracted Popular War.

### AUC

#### History

In the late 1980s, some self defense groups were mobilized by agricultural farmers and cattle raisers to protect their regions from kidnapping and guerrilla attacks. In 1994, various regional groups decided to get together under a common command structure and begin a counterinsurgency fight. This gathering of self defense groups became known as the Colombian self defense groups. But it was only until 1997, after the first meeting of the national self defense groups, they became a national movement under the name of the Colombian United Self Defense Organization (AUC). This group bases its sustainment on drug trafficking and oriented its military struggle against any guerrilla or terrorist organization only. They always avoided the military or police forces confronting them as a defense mechanism. Their activities and influence in the internal conflict did not last a long

time. After only five years of fighting, the FARC-EP and ELN essentially began a peace negotiation under the presidency of Alvaro Uribe Velez.

### Development

When Colombian President Alvaro Uribe Velez won the presidency, he proclaimed the will to establish peace negotiations with all illegal organizations in order to end Colombian's internal conflict. In October of 2002, the Colombian president was informed through the Catholic Church leaders that the AUC wanted to begin a peace process. The process itself began on November 29<sup>th</sup> 2002 when through a public letter, the AUC announced a national unilateral cease fire. This cease fire was the government's main requirement to begin a peace negotiation. On December 23<sup>rd</sup>, the government established the exploratory peace commission in order to begin the negotiations and on July 15<sup>th</sup> 2003, the first peace agreement was signed. On this agreement, the AUC undertook the commitment of demobilizing their total organization by the end of 2005 as their input to Colombia's history seeking peace initiative. The government undertook the commitment of developing all the mechanisms to incorporate their members into the society. By the end of 2006, more than 31,000 member AUC members were demobilized. Actually, the AUC leaders are in a United States jail after being extradited by the Colombian government and most of their members have been reinserted into the society.

### Colombian Army

The Colombian Army, in an effort to meet the emerging national threats, had to re-adjust its training, equipment, size and other aspects to accomplish their constitutional missions of the national sovereignty defense, independence, territory integrity and

constitutional order (1991 Art 217). There are some unclassified issues that are depicted because of their importance in the military development. The most important element to develop military change is the adaptation of organizational culture. As noted in previous conflicts, it is important to re-adjust the thinking of military and civilian leaders to the special demands of counterinsurgency warfare (Galula 2005, 94).

### Organization

The first issue to analyze is its army's organizational development. Colombian military forces were originally composed completely of conscripted soldiers called regular or "bachelor" soldiers. These soldiers were on service between 12 (bachelor soldiers) and 24 months (regular soldiers). This was a disadvantage because a regular soldier took about three months to be prepared to go to combat and after about 12 months, when soldiers had gained some experience in combat, they had finished their mandatory service time. Because of this disadvantage, the Colombian army began to incorporate the volunteer soldier that later on became a professional soldier. At the beginning, professional soldiers were incorporated after mandatory service directly to counter guerrilla units. Today's professional soldiers, after a selection process to join the professional soldiers' military school, receive military training. After training and in accordance with each specialty, these soldiers are sent to counter-guerrilla battalions.

Another change in the army was the so called "soldiers of my town" program. These soldiers were drafted from rural towns with the mission to serve in a platoon located in their own town to protect it and support the police force. This program has been very successful because the soldiers know the population and if any terrorist tries to infiltrate the

population, they are more easily identified. Also, because they are originally from that town, there is greater loyalty and support from the population. The populace provides these soldiers more information and has more confidence in the system knowing that local members are party of the security plan. It is clear that the center of gravity of modern warfare is the control of populace (Trinquier 1961, 104). That is the reason that the Army has made a concerted effort to control the rural areas through a permanent military presence. Another capability of these soldiers is the knowledge of the terrain. When counter guerrilla units conduct offensive operations, these hometown soldiers often send one or two soldiers to be the point men for other deployed armys' units.

Alongside the professionalization of the security forces, the Army conducted structural reorganizations to execute different missions. The army is organized into seven territorial divisions, brigades and battalions that have the mission of conducting limited offensive operations but focus their efforts in active military control operations. These military control operations are oriented to secure the population and infrastructure in every village or town within their respective jurisdiction. Also the Army has more than one hundred counter guerrilla battalions organized in 25 mobile brigades. Some of these mobile brigades are assigned to the territorial divisions in order to conduct offensive operations complementing military control operations by the regional brigades.

Other new organizations were the Commando Battalion, Lancero Group, the quick deployment force (FUDRA) and the decisive action joint force (FUCAD). The first two units were created to conduct special operations against strategic and high value targets. They were grouped under the Joint Special Operations Command directly under the General Forces Command. The other two units, consolidating some of the best mobile

brigades, were created to conduct counter- guerrilla operations against strategic objectives. These units have the capability to deploy to any part of Colombia and conduct strategic operations under joint operational commands. The joint operational commands are army level organizations under the control of the military forces commander control that group several territorial divisions in coordination with naval and air force units.

### Soldier's Distribution

These new soldiers and unit re- organizations also required a change in the employment and distribution strategy. Currently, the army employs the drafted soldiers in garrison activities and fixed base security. These bases are located in medium or low threat areas and are usually in close proximity of professional soldier units to provide support in case of a terrorist attack. In contrast, the professional soldiers are employed in offensive and defensive operations all over the territory but especially in the high level risk areas. In order to determine the area of the soldier's assignment, the Army divided the country in three different levels each one recognized with a different color according to the threat's capabilities.

The areas where the terrorist threat has been neutralized are considered green areas. In these areas, the focus is on consolidation operations with the ratio of draft soldier and two percent professional soldiers at approximately 3:1. The other areas are those where the threat has not been completely neutralized and still have the capability to conduct terrorist actions against the military and police forces, population or infrastructure. These areas are considered a yellow area with the ratio of draft soldiers to professional soldiers at 1:3. The focus of these units is a combination of offensive operations and some consolidation

operations. The last area distribution is the red areas. In these areas, the terrorist threat is imminent and they have a very high capability of conducting large operations against the military and police forces, population and key infrastructure. In these areas, all the soldiers assigned are professional soldiers and the focus is on offensive operations.

The areas depicted are not fixed. Though the purpose of the strategy is to bring all areas to a green status, it is important to understand that the threat is dynamic, always looking to adapt according to the situation. If the terrorist groups have too much pressure on a red zone; they will try to move to a yellow or green zone to destabilize it. Therefore, it is important to maintain enough flexibility to react to any changes in the threat environment. A relatively new capability designed to keep the terrorists unbalanced and incapable of adapting is the Colombian Special Operations Forces (SOF).

### Special Operations

One of the key elements to have executed strategic operations with positive results is the special operations forces (SOF). Some years ago, special forces battalions were different than a counter guerrilla battalion because of their equipment, training and support, yet their organization, missions and some of their operational techniques were similar. Today, the special forces brigade and its three battalions are organized to conduct operations against strategic and high value targets. The brigade has special reconnaissance units, a new capability, that has been able to infiltrate deep in the jungle to locate strategic targets and conduct direct action operations. This brigade is under the command of the army chief of operations and is employed throughout Colombian territory.

Another innovation was the creation of the Commandos Battalion and the Lancero Group. The general forces commander and his staff directly employ these units. The Commando Battalion's, even though it has direct action capabilities, main mission is to conduct special reconnaissance missions. Once targets are located, then its direct action elements or any other supporting unit conducts the offensive mission. Meanwhile, the Lancero Group is focused on direct action operations but also has limited special reconnaissance capabilities. These two units usually work together to complement their capabilities and do conduct simultaneous operations in different parts of Colombia. Special operations forces have played a very important role in the prosecution of the campaign..They have conducted operations that resulted in the killing of different strategic FARC-EP leaders such as Aka Raul Reyes (FARC-EP second in command), aka Negro Acasio (front commander in charge of the drug trafficking network in the south) and aka Martin Caballero (leader of the northern FARC-EP structures). The employment of special operation forces would not been possible without the procurement and development of intelligence and technological capabilities.

The Colombian Army has developed an extensive intelligence capability supported by a robust technological backbone. Military intelligence (MI) elements have been developing different capacities that have allowed them to reach the leadership of all illegal organizations. Military and police intelligence have given SOF valuable information in order to conduct strategic operations. The intelligence provided is not just limited to information analysis. MI units are actively conducting operations to penetrate the high level echelons of the subversive organizations. Some of the achievements of military intelligence

operations are the rescue of FARC-EP's strategic hostages and the capture of Simon Trinidad in Ecuador.

Another element that helped to improve the forces capability is technology. The incremental increase in air power, not only in numbers but also in night capability, has been a fundamental key enhancement for the Colombian Army. Today's military forces have the flexibility to conduct operations anywhere and anytime in Colombia. Technology has also been essential to prevent terrorist attacks. When the FARC-EP was transitioning from the first to the second phase of their protracted warfare campaign, air force technology helped locate large concentrations of terrorists in order to conduct air or land offensive operations. These operations forced the FARC-EP to move back to first phase operations and limit their military actions. This stopped their fast advance towards a general offensive in the late 1990s. These increases in intelligence and technological capabilities reached their peak during the recent strategic operation known as Operation Jacque.

### Operation Jacque

Operation Jacque or "Checkmate" was an extremely unique operation. It was planned and executed only by military intelligence personnel. It is the tip of the iceberg of the successful operations against the FARC in the past years (Torres 2008, 15). With advanced technological capabilities, the Army was able to intercept communications between the terrorist aka "Cesar" who was in charge of the hostages and the FARC-EP central command. Once this first phase was executed and after months of analyzing and studying the people on the radio, military intelligence (MI) personnel took over the communication network. . MI personnel began to send messages making various FARC



nodes believe that they were receiving messages from the FARC-EP leadership when they were really being sent by the Colombian Army. After the MI was confident that the communications were well-established between them and the terrorists, they ordered “Cesar” to group the hostages in a single location as part of a ruse plan to rescue them. “Cesar”, thinking that it was an order from the FARC-EP leaders, grouped the high value captives (HVCs) in a specific place in Colombian jungle. Once the hostages were consolidated, the MI continued to shape events by developing a humanitarian aid mission scenario whereby army personnel would play the role of a non-governmental organization helping the FARC transport the hostages to a given location to meet the FARC leadership.

On July 2, 2008, the helicopter landed in the place where “Cesar” had the hostages. After coordinating with “Cesar”, the faked humanitarian commission got the hostages along with “Cesar” and his security terrorist aboard a helicopter. Once the helicopter was in the air, MI personnel captured the two terrorists and liberated 15 hostages. While this operation took place, special forces and commando units were nearby on board UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters with all the air support needed to execute a military direct action operation in case the military intelligence operation failed. With this operation, the army showed its enhanced capabilities, rescuing 15 HVCs and capturing two terrorists without firing one single shot.

### Democratic Security Policy

The Colombian military situation could not improve without government support and commitment. When President Alvaro Uribe Velez reached the presidency in 2002, he established his security policy. Within the framework of this policy, he established five

strategic objectives in order to improve the situation in Colombia (Velez 2000, 32). His first strategic objective was territorial control. To achieve this objective, the number of military and police personnel increased in order to have the capability to be in almost every part of Colombia executing offensive, active military control and consolidation operations. Once this condition was achieved, the state began different programs to provide health, home and economic development to all regions of the country

Another strategic goal was public security. It is understood that without security there cannot be any development. In order to achieve this objective, the government supported the growth of the military and its response capability. This meant not only increasing the numbers of soldiers but also procuring new equipment to gain the required flexibility to respond to any threat in a timely offensive action. Also, the military and police forces focused on deploying a large number of units to safeguard lines of communication and key infrastructure. Once the population felt safe to travel anywhere in Colombia the economy and living standards began to improve.

Another objective of this policy was to control the drug trade. To achieve this policy, the government established reward policies to those who gave information or to those who deserted the illegal organizations. This reward policy lead to the capture of different drug lords such as aka “Don Diego”, who was the most important drug lord in Colombia. Also, there has been reinforced international cooperation to find and target financing and trafficking networks. To ensure a higher interdiction capability, the air and sea capacities along Colombian coasts and borders have been improved with equipment and technology.

The fourth strategic objective was social development. Once security was achieved, Colombia's regions became very stable with confidence increasing not only within the national population but with the international community. After confidence increased, private investment was brought to the regions, raising their economic growth and social well being. This social well being was focused on meeting the people's basic needs such as health, education, and basic services.

To accomplish the prior objectives, the president established the fifth objective, efficiency and transparency. Confidence in the government and its military and police forces could only be achieved with this objective. Transparency in all activities would legitimize the use of the military force and the correct employment of national and international resources. It had to be accompanied with efficiency in order to be able to achieve all the objectives with the resources available and within the allotted time frame according to the population needs and the government goals.

The "Democratic Security Policy" had highly positive results. From 2002 to 2006 homicides were reduced by forty percent (figure 1); kidnapping and extortion by 83 percent (figure 2); homicides from terrorist attack by 72 percent and kidnapping at illegal roadblocks by 99 percent (C. M. Defense 2007, 10).

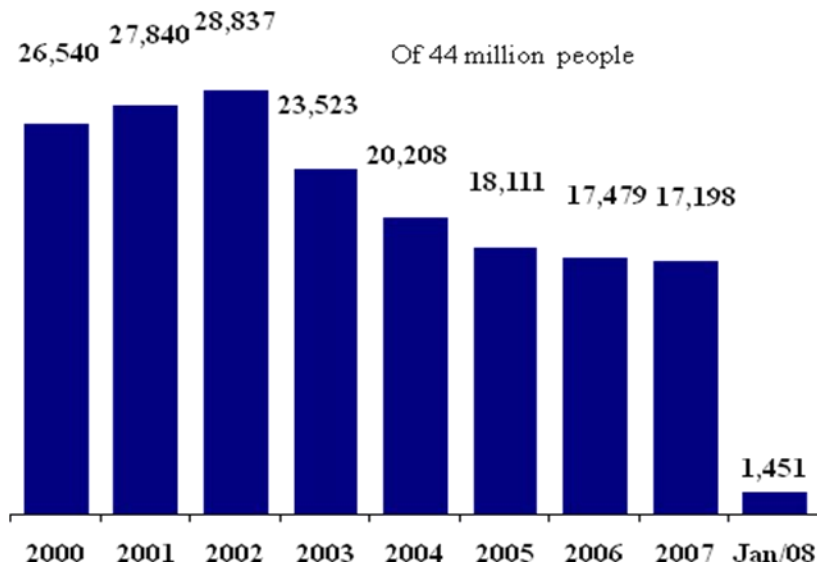


Figure 1. Homicides

Source: Ministry of Defense, “Policy for the Consolidation of the Democratic Security” (C. M. Defense 2009, Slide 13).

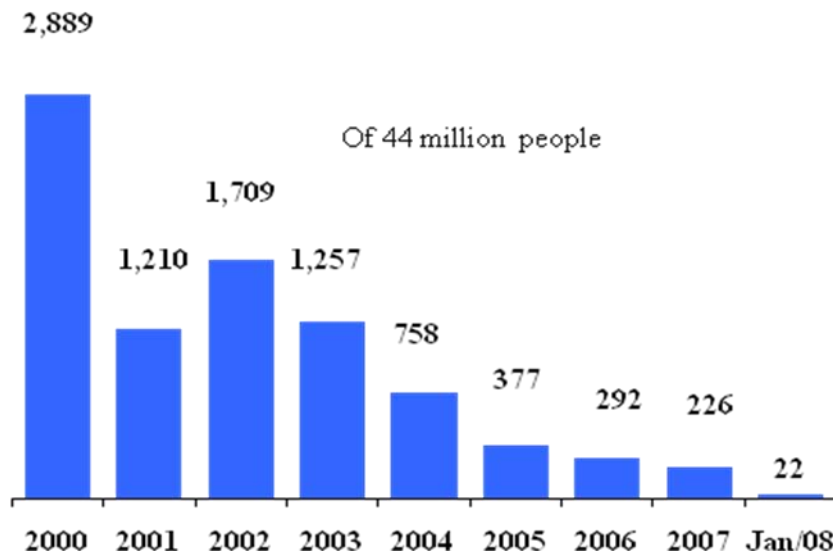


Figure 2. Kidnapping

Source: Ministry of Defense, “Policy for the Consolidation of the Democratic Security” (C. M. Defense 2009, Slide 13).

## Policy for the Consolidation of Democratic Security

In 2006, the first presidential term of President Alvaro Uribe concluded yet another policy that was established by Minister of Defense, Juan Manuel Santos, in order to continue the efforts of the initial democratic security policy. This plan came to be known as the National Development Plan 2006-2010 “Community State: Development for Everyone.” The policy articulates the strategic objectives that focus on each one of the institutions in the defense sector (C. M. Defense 2007, 5). This policy, similar to the democratic security policy, established five strategic objectives. The first strategic objective consolidated territorial control and strengthened the rule of law across the entire national territory. When the military and police forces establish territorial control and security, the judicial branch and all other government’s institutions are able to reach those territories. The government, through its institutions, ensures the accomplishment of all goals and the exercise of citizens’ rights. In order to achieve this objective, the Ministry of Defense developed a territorial control consolidation strategy that focused on ensuring the presence of security elements all over the territory. Also, it developed an integrated action doctrine to coordinate and synchronize all the government and military institutions actions in Colombia.

The second objective protected the public and held on to the strategic initiative against all threats to citizen security. This was an offensive objective focused on locating and neutralizing all illegal elements in the society. It focused on population security and building confidence in national institutions. Through military offensive operations, the government is attempting to force the demobilization of terrorist membership. By forcing this condition, the government intends to reduce the strength of these illegal organizations

the demobilization is accepted for terrorist organizations, drug cartels and organized crime organizations to include former AUC members that did not demobilize with the previous peace negotiations.

The third objective drastically raises the cost of trafficking drugs in Colombia. Military and police forces will focus their efforts with specialized units to attack and destroy the entire drug trafficking network supply chain. Eradication of illicit crops with the support of the farmers is the initial effort. This eradication strategy is supported through interdiction, not only of the drug itself, but also of the precursors needed to process it. Reinforcing territorial control to avoid the growth of new illicit crops and the neutralization of the illegal armed groups and the drug trafficking structures have reduced the cartels and independent traffickers capability, allowing the government to dramatically reduce drug production and trafficking.

The fourth objective keeps public security forces modern and effective, with a high level of legitimacy based on public confidence and support. Special investments have been made to increase military and police capabilities. The goal is to gain mobility for the forces, increase their military and police intelligence capabilities, establish a standing force and finally increase their strategic capabilities. The last objective of the “Policy for the Consolidation of Democratic Security” maintains the downward trend in all crime rates in the country’s urban centers. Since Colombia is a big urban society, significant efforts have been made to ensure the population’s security. The main effort to achieve this security has been made through the National Police. By the year 2004, the national police had already established a police station in all 1.099 municipalities of Colombia (C. M. Defense 2007, 14). In order to understand the objectives achieved through the “Democratic Security

Policy and the Policy” for the Consolidation of the Democratic Security, it is important to see their results.

### Worldwide Situation

Today’s strategic security environment involves irregular warfare employing asymmetric methods to defeat regular armies. The Colombian Army has been in an internal conflict for more than 50 years and with the army’s evolution, the threats have also been evolving. The United States and its allies have been involved in irregular warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan for seven years and as a result of that war, the US has had over 4,000 casualties on the battlefield. The US and allied forces have improved their tactical and technical knowledge reducing the number of casualties. Yet, the terrorist threat has been analyzing these improvements and is sure to adapt in order to find new opportunities to exploit. Any experience or lessons learned in similar environments or type of warfare might help to reduce even more the effects of the threats’ actions.

The experience of the Colombian Army gained during its internal conflict might be employed by US and allied forces not only in Afghanistan or Iraq, but also in any other environment facing this kind of irregular warfare.

### Primary Research Question

Could the irregular warfare strategies and operational concepts that Colombia currently practices against the terrorists groups be used in other scenarios?

### Secondary Research Questions

1. How have Colombian Presidents supported the fight against the terrorist threats?
2. How have the terrorist groups developed their strategies during the Colombian conflict?
3. How have Colombia's Army strategies and operational concepts developed during the Colombian conflict to face the terrorist threat?
4. What are Colombia's strategies and operational concepts used in today's irregular warfare?
5. How have the population influenced in the conflict?
6. How has economy influenced the conflict?

### Significance

Worldwide, warfare has been changing according to technological influences on the battlefield. Because of this technological advance in developed countries, the gap between the military powers and their adversaries is growing larger every day. Most of the democratic countries face the terrorist groups' threats. Those groups are aware of that technological gap and their daily effort is to find ways to attack large powers without exposing their disadvantages. In order to do this, the terrorist groups have been employing irregular warfare tactics involving operations within the civilian population to minimize the opponent's capabilities. Another method used is asymmetric warfare. With this warfare, terrorist groups try compensating for the lack of large armies by attacking their opponent's vulnerabilities exploiting surprise and terrain and unconventional weapons, such as improvised explosive devices.



This thesis, Colombian current irregular warfare strategies and operational concepts practiced against the terrorists groups may be used in other scenarios, becomes very important to the leaders and soldiers in today's worldwide warfare. Different terrorist organizations or groups, despite their goals, tend to use some of the same strategies that have worked in similar organizations. Therefore, the experience acquired by other armies, in this case the Colombian Army, are likely useful to improve the U. S. and any other army's capability to fight today's terrorist threat.

### Assumptions

The Colombian Army uses strategies and operational concepts that are helping win the asymmetric war and should be useful to US or other allied forces facing similar threats. Irregular and counterinsurgent warfare have similar operational environments. Irregular forces use the same principles based on the asymmetric warfare. Every terrorist or insurgent group has established parameters and usually follows former principles.

### Definitions

Asymmetric warfare: Small groups or very loosely knit organizations which employ terror by threatening to or actually attacking civilian populations and infrastructure (Corbin 2001).

Guerrilla warfare: Is the unconventional warfare and combat with which a small group of combatants use mobile tactics (ambushes, raids, etc.) to combat a larger and less mobile formal army (FM 3-24 2006, 19).

Insurgency: An organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict (FM 3-24 2006, 13).

Irregular warfare: A violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations (D. o. Defense 2007, 1).

Terrorism: The calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological (D. o. Defense 2007, B-8).

### Limitations

This research has some limitations in the access to restricted strategic documents used by the Colombian Army because they have not been established as doctrine or published as reference books. Most of the information will be based on unclassified documents, conferences, lessons learned and personal experiences. Some of the strategies and operational concepts that have been published or addressed in former presentations will also be used. Even though this thesis is not a deep study on all the conflict areas, it gives the reader a thorough understanding of the situation with the limited information.

### Delimitations

The research will be focused primarily on the strategy developed by the actual President of Colombia, Alvaro Uribe Velez, with all its components. His strategy addresses not only the military ways to achieve his proposal but also the mission or roles given to the other elements of the state.

Following this, the research will depict the Colombian Army's strategies and operational concepts used since 2002 and especially those that influenced today's strategic and operational results. The research will also depict the different stages or phases the

narco terrorist organizations (ONTs) followed to analyze if they had achieved their goal or not.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Colombian internal conflict has been going on for more than five decades and has left over 50,000 victims. Chapter one introduced the reader to this thesis. This chapter will highlight literature that helps answer the primary research question: Could the irregular warfare strategies and operational concepts that Colombia currently practices be useful in other scenarios? To answer this question, it is important to analyze open source documents that depict the evolution of both the Colombian Army and the narco terrorist organizations.

This chapter will discuss some of the literature used to analyze both the Colombian Army's and the terrorist groups, development. This chapter is divided according to differing methods of publication. It will depict some written documents such as policies, books and field manuals; articles about the conflict or its actors in different magazines, newspapers or WebPages that were used in the development of his thesis. Finally, this chapter will give an overview of some of the case studies to be analyzed in chapter four.

#### Written Documents

##### Books

##### Counterinsurgency Warfare, Theory and Practice

“War is not a chess game but a vast social phenomenon with infinitely greater and ever-expanding number of variables” (Galula 2005, ix). This part of David Galula's, the author of this experientially rich book, introduction gives the reader the idea of a very influencing book on counterinsurgency. Galula, a former French military officer, gained considerable experience in the raising of a communist party while serving as the assistant

French military attaché in Beijing. This experience later helped distinguish when he led a company in the Algerian War. In his book, *Counterinsurgency Warfare, Theory and Practice*, he uses his experience in order to stimulate analysis of counterinsurgency warfare (Galula 2005, vi). In the first three chapters, he presents the nature and characteristics of revolutionary war as well as the prerequisites and doctrine relevant to insurgent warfare. After defining the problem, he gives different examples of counterinsurgency warfare both in the cold and hot revolutionary wars. Finally, after defining the strategic and tactical levels of counterinsurgency, he suggests eight steps for the conduct of counterinsurgency military operations. This book is rich in Galula's personal experience and constitutes a must-read for those involved in counterinsurgency operations. Even though all insurgent movements are not the same, they tend to follow similar paths. Therefore, the study of this book will give the reader the knowledge to compare different insurgent groups. Similar to the nature of the Colombian conflict, Galula identified war not only as a clash of forces, but also as a political struggle. In order to destroy an insurgent movement, it is necessary to eradicate the insurgent political agents from the population (Galula 2005, 123.). This is not well understood by the political leaders in unstable countries and usually it leads to a judicial warfare where the state and its military and police forces become delegitimized by communist parties.

#### Modern Warfare, A French View of Counterinsurgency

“The trouble into which a regular Army must inevitably-perhaps fatally- run when it is committed to a long string revolutionary wars is only dimly perceived in America so far” (Trinquier 1961, xviii). As depicted in its introduction, this book is a timely warning to

those nations involved in insurgent warfare. Written by Roger Trinquier a former French Army officer who served in the Algerian War, it depicts invaluable theories seen in counterinsurgent warfare that may be applied in different scenarios involving this type of threat. The first part of his book depicts the importance of being prepared for war. He states that the defense of national territory is the reason for an army to exist and that such an army should always be capable of accomplishing this objective (Trinquier 1961, 3). It is important to analyze this statement not only through a military, but also a political lens. An army without political support will never be prepared to accomplish this objective. This is reinforced in his book's second part in which he describes the political and military conduct of war. And finally, in his book's third part, he focuses on the importance of not fighting only in the controlled territories but to take the war to their territories (Trinquier 1961, 105). This book is also very important for those involved in insurgent warfare because it helps one understand some methods to conduct counterinsurgency operations. As stated before, not all insurgencies are the same and not all methods of fighting an insurgency will work in all situations, but those methods will help military and political leaders gain a different and wider vision of the potential solutions to a certain problem.

### Operación Jacque

The FARC have been living in the past months their *Annus horribilis*, their most critical moment, the moment that must bring them into their demobilization and to a peace process (Torres 2008, 15). This is a fragment of the Colombian Minister of Defense Juan Manuel Santo's prologue to this amazing book, *Operation Jacque*. This book is a description of all the elements involved in the planning and execution of Operation Jacque.

This is one of the most important operations the Colombian Army ever conducted. This operation was conducted only by Army intelligence elements from its beginning. It involved different variables in warfare: intelligence, technology and the most important, deception. Besides rescuing some of the people kidnapped by the FARC several years ago without a single shot or casualty, it constituted one of the best strategic operations against this terrorist group. A former Colombian presidential candidate, also with French nationality, three American contractors and military and police officers and non-commissioned officers were all rescued during the operation. The former presidential candidate and the three American contractors were political and strategic hostages due to their international back ground. This book is very important to those involved in counterinsurgency operations because it shows a different view of the warfare and the possibility of conducting even the improbable to achieve victory. The book *Operation Jacque* is also very important because it shows that military operations can be conducted solely with intelligence assets and can still achieve the victories reserved in the past for only combat and special operations forces.

#### Hablan los Generales

This book, *Generals Talk*, is a compilation of interview results of Colombian military and police forces conducted during the history of Colombian counterinsurgency warfare. Glenda Martinez Osorio interviews the military leaders who conducted significant operations throughout Colombia. It begins with the operations against the first communist guerrilla movement in the south of Colombia. This operation was the starting point for the military physiological operations and the relationship with the community in 1961. It

depicts the operations that have ended with the former guerrilla leaders. It also explains the operation against the FARC sanctuaries such as Operation Marquetalia in 1962 against the so-called “Marquetalia Independent Republic”, and Operation Colombia in 1990 against the last FARC sanctuary in Colombia “Casa Verde” (green house). This book also depicts operations conducted against the main drug cartels in Colombia, the former Medellin and Cali drug cartels. The last operation depicted in this book is Operation Liberty One, a democracy security policy in action. This operation was led by former General Reinaldo Castellanos in the late 2002. General Castellanos was the Colombian army commander from November 2004 until February 2006 (Martinez 2006, 311). This operation was against one of the strategic objectives of the FARC, the surrounding and blocking of Bogota, the Colombian capital city.

This book is an important legacy of the leaders of the most important operations against the different threats involved in the Colombian conflict. As a military and political leader, it is important to have the knowledge of former experiences of both successful and unsuccessful operations. This knowledge will give the reader the ability to have a wider vision of the problem and different ways to approach it.

#### Democratic Security and Defense Policy

The most important document in Colombia’s current strategy is President Alvaro Uribe’s Security and Defense Policy published in 2003 (Defense 2003). This policy established the strategic objectives to be followed during his presidency. The objectives described in this policy are consolidation of state control throughout Colombia, protection of the population, elimination of the illegal drugs trade in Colombia, maintenance of a



deterrent capability and a transparent and efficient management of resources. Many articles have been written about this policy. The *Military Review* magazine, in its July 2007 edition, published an article about Colombian counterinsurgency operations. When reading this article, it is important to note that it was written by a non-Colombian author. It is important to read it from the point of view of a non-Colombian writer, in this case, Dr Thomas A. Marks. In this article, the author analyzes the change of Colombian policy since the ascendancy of Alvaro Uribe Velez to the presidency (Marks 2007). This is the most important to analyze because it coordinates all the Colombian governmental institutions toward achievement of a common goal. This policy is complemented by the policy for the consolidation of the democratic security. This new policy was established on 2006 after Alvaro Uribe's first presidency term. It establishes unity of effort among the entire defense sector to neutralize all illegal elements that threaten Colombia's stability.

### Field Manuals

#### Colombian Army FM 3-10 Counter-guerrilla Operations

It is the Colombian Army's field manual that establishes the operational and tactical aspects of irregular warfare. As described in the thesis' first chapter, this manual describes the origins and process of a guerrilla movement and specifically focuses on the Colombian narco terrorist groups. In the following chapters, it describes different operational concepts, tactics and maneuvers to conduct irregular warfare operations (C. Army 2002). This manual is very important because it describes different operations that the Colombian Army conducted against the narco terrorist organizations. Some of them differ from American doctrine.

## FARC-EP Strategic Manual

This document explains the narco terrorist group's origin and strategies throughout their history. In this document, the secretariat (leadership council composed of seven members) explains the objectives that need to be reached in able to take over the government of Colombia. They establish military, economic and political goals. After the death of the top FARC-EP leader Manuel Marulanda Velez and the killing of the second-in-command Raul Reyes in a military operation, Alfonso Cano emerged as the new FARC-EP leader. He sent his subordinates a document establishing the new strategy for the organization. He focuses on returning to basic guerrilla warfare, attacking the air supremacy of the armed forces and basing the tactical defense in land mines to stop or at least delay military operations. This strategy is important to analyze because it depicts the latest changes in the FARC's doctrine and objectives. This strategy is not published as an official document but it is the result of some of the latest FARC secretariat meetings. The objectives and policies contained in this document vary constantly according to the changes of the whole environment.

## Articles

There are many articles that have been written about Colombia's internal conflict. One key article, published by The Heritage Foundation, depicts the situation of the Colombian war. "Terrorism, Insurgency, and Drugs Still Threaten America's Southern Flank", describes both the situation in Colombia and implications to the United States. It also analyzes the latest operational successes of Colombian Army against the terrorist Group FARC-EP (Walser 2008).

There are also many articles published on web pages that depict Colombia's internal conflict. Some of them see this conflict as a civil war. According to the Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, a civil war is a war between opposing groups of citizens of the same country. But in Colombia, the FARC-EP is just a terrorist group that represents a 0.01% of the total Colombian population and that does not have more than 0.1% of the population supporting their war. One of these articles is the "Evolution of the Colombian Civil War, 1928-1973". In this article, the author describes how the evolution of the conflict changed during those years.

### Case Studies

In order to better understand the evolution of Colombian warfare, it is important to analyze some case studies from the conflict. These case studies include the attacks that the narco terrorist groups conducted during 1997 and 1998 when they killed more than 200 military personnel and kidnapped more than 300. At this time, the FARC-EP was transitioning from a war of movement to a war of position. They also analyze recent Colombian forces' military operations against all the narco terrorist organizations. This analysis helps to better explain the evolution of the capabilities and strategies used by both, the Colombian armed forces and the guerrillas.

Chapter Three will explain the methodology that will be used in this thesis and how all the information will be collected. Chapter Four will analyze all the stages of the conflict from both perspectives: Colombian Army and ONTs. Each case study will be analyzed and placed in the different stages of conflict. Chapter Five will depict some recommendations and conclusions that will help the reader to analyze and understand if the irregular warfare

strategies and operational concepts that Colombia currently practices could be useful in other scenarios.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

Chapter Two, Literature Review, discussed existing documents as sources in which readers can find information that supports the answer to the primary research question: Could the irregular warfare strategies and operational concepts that Colombia currently practices be useful in other scenarios? Chapter Three presents a methodology to analyze the relevant information and get to its source.

This first part of this thesis is an exploratory study of the internal conflict between the Colombian government and various narco terrorist organizations (ONTs) since 1949. Specifically, it will explore the history and development of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia People's Army (ONT - FARC-EP), the National Liberation Army (ONT - ELN) and the United Colombian Self-Defense Group (AUC) The primary focus will be on the FARC-EP as the AUC is already demobilized and is not an influencing element today. The ELN is still active but does not have the capability of conducting large scale offensives and is currently conducting peace negotiation with the government. The organizations will be analyzed chronologically. Concerning the Colombian Army, it will be analyzed according to its organizational transformation, its doctrine, and its strategic, operational and tactical employment. It will also analyze the important influence of the President Alvaro Uribe Velez's democratic security policy and the subsequent continuation of the policy for the consolidation of democratic security developed by the Minister of Defense, Juan Manuel Santos.

This thesis will also analyze the development of the effects of the internal conflict in the country. It will employ operational variables in order to show the most important

elements that influence the Colombian internal conflict. It will also use a quantitative research method in order to analyze how those effects can be measured. It is important to analyze the “numbers” of the conflict both chronologically and by the stages of the war. The word “numbers” is intended to represent the effects of the conflict on the Colombian power elements: military, political, economic and social. In the military component, the statistics being measured are soldiers assassinated, wounded and kidnapped, terrorists killed in action, captured and demobilized. The political realm will be analyzed for the political support, direct attack against political institutions or people and influence among the rural political system. The economic variable will be analyzed in terms of the effects on the international investment, profits, regional investments and infrastructure damage. Finally, the social variable is important to analyze in terms of non-combatant casualties, child recruitment, and civilian kidnapping.

### Case Study Selection

The most influential case studies will be selected for this analysis in order to depict the evolution of this conflict. Once the “numbers” of the conflict are analyzed, qualitative research will point to the most important variables of the conflict. By analyzing both the Colombian Army and the ONTs' strategies and operational concepts used in this irregular warfare, this thesis will analyze the war's development. To be more specific, there will be analysis of different case studies in order to examine particular conflict situations in greater depth to provide as much information as possible (Ellen Taylor-Powell, Sara Steele 1996).

When analyzing the army perspective, the case studies will look at the Army's weakness or mistakes such as the terrorist assault in Las Delicias, Putumayo where 31

soldiers were killed, 17 wounded and 60 kidnapped (Semana 1998). Another army weakness was evidenced in the attack on Mitu, a Colombian department (state equivalent) capital city. It will also show the army's capabilities as seen in the recent operation "Jaque" where the army rescued important hostages from the jungle and the operation that ended with the death of Raul Reyes (second in command in the FARC-EP structure).

### Source of Evidence

In order to gather and obtain all the sources of evidence to demonstrate the veracity of the information, this research will be focused on depicting and analyzing existing data bases from different governmental and non-governmental sources. This thesis will be supported by histories and research reports found in official sites. Finally, in order to help the reader to gain greater understanding and insight into this situation, this thesis will use graphics depicting the evolution of different variables during the conflict.

Chapter Four will analyze all the stages of the conflict from both perspectives: the Colombian Army and that of the ONTs. Every example will be analyzed according to the protracted popular warfare stages and in relation to Colombian forces development. Chapter Five will make some recommendations and conclusions that will help the reader to understand that the irregular warfare strategies and operational concepts that Colombia currently practices are useful in other scenarios.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

Chapter Three presented the methodology this thesis will use to gather and analyze information. This chapter will present that analysis in order to answer the primary research question: Could the irregular warfare strategies and operational concepts that Colombia currently practices be useful in other scenarios? This analysis will be done based on the information provided in previous chapters and personal experience during the conflict. In order to have a better understanding, the analysis is organized using the US Army operational variables rather than in the Colombian Army variables. The operational variables established in the US Army doctrine are: political, military, economic, social, information, and infrastructure, physical environment and time (PMESII – PT) (FM 3-0 2008).

#### Political

“The political variable describes the distribution of responsibility and power at all levels of governance. Political structures and processes enjoy varying degrees of legitimacy with populations from local through international levels” (FM 3-0 2008, 1-5). An insurgent movement cannot be considered just as an armed organization to overthrow an existing government. Most armed insurgent movements are supported by a political party. The FARC-EP has, from their inception, been aligned with political parties. The first one was known as the Colombian Communist Party. This communist party organized the farmers as the main body of an armed resistance in 1930. Actually, this terrorist group has the clandestine Colombian communist party (C4). Founded in 2000,



this party replaced the existing Colombian Communist Party because it was not radical enough to support the armed war as a method to achieve power (Communist parties in the Americas n.d.).

Another political influence that supports the revolutionary warfare of the terrorist groups is the international support. Terrorist groups cannot survive in today's globalized world without the support of external organizations or supportive political parties. For many years the Colombian terrorist groups have been supported by organizations and governments around the world. On March 1 2008, the Colombian military forces conducted an operation in which Raul Reyes, the second in command of the FARC-EP, was killed. During this operation, several laptop computers with information about international support were captured. The captured files showed relations with organizations in Canada, Mexico, Cuba, El Salvador, Venezuela, and some others (R. Semana 2009). This information has allowed the government to directly attack these international organizations by capturing some of their members and confiscating money.

During the conflict, different presidents have supported the military effort against the terrorist threat. But the one with the best achievements employing the different fields of government is the current president, Alvaro Uribe Velez. President Uribe outlines, in his democratic security policy, five strategic objectives in order to preserve the national security and its interests. This policy was successful during President Uribe's first presidential term. During this period, the number of homicides in Colombia was reduced by 40 percent, the number of kidnappings for extortion by 83 percent, the number of victims from collective homicides by 72 percent, terrorist attacks by 61 percent, and kidnappings at illegal roadblocks by 99 percent (C. M. Defense 2007). Beginning in

President Uribe's second presidential term, the Colombian Ministry of Defense developed the Policy for the Consolidation of Democratic Security (PCDS). This policy, in the same manner as the first, was also successful. From 2007 to the end of 2008, the kidnappings were reduced by 24 percent; the extortion by 23 percent; oil pipe lines destruction by 44 percent; and terrorist groups' actions by 29 percent. In order to understand this analysis, it is important to examine the charts depicting the variations in different aspects of these policies.

### Military

"The military variable includes the military capabilities of all armed forces in a given operational environment" (FM 3-0 2008, 1-6). In order to analyze the military variable, it is necessary to examine the capabilities of the armed forces that influence Colombian conflict. The first capability of an armed force is the ability to equip their personnel or units. The illegal forces began their subversive movements with few weapons. At the beginning in order for a combatant to have a weapon, he or she had to participate in an attack on the government forces and be able to kill a soldier and take his weapon. Later on, support from communist countries allowed them to get support to better equip their organizations. After the terrorist groups began to deal with narco-trafficking, their ability to equip improved further. At the time of this writing, they do not have the air or sea capability to confront Colombian military forces. In the land battle, they maintain guerrilla type unit equipment that is similar to that of light infantry in conventional warfare. For artillery, they use light infantry mortars obtained during raids against regular forces and unconventional indirect fire asset fabricated from gas cylinders. This is the most common indirect asset.

Conversely, the Colombian military police forces and have seen considerably more advances in their technological and doctrine areas. Today those forces are under the ministry of defense, share intelligence and conduct coordinated military operations. Police forces focus their operations against the drug cartels and the protection of the population and infrastructure. In 1990 during Operation Colombia in an offensive operation against the last FARC sanctuary, Colombian air power was very limited in numbers and capable of only daytime operations, especially with rotary wing assets. Through the implementation of plan, Colombia and the creation of the Army Aviation, this air capability has grown. Colombian air power has increased both in numbers and capability. This capability has given the Army both increased flexibility and fire power. In addition, fixed wing capabilities have also increased. Colombia now operates modern intelligence airplanes with communications interceptions and infrared and thermal capabilities. This capability proved crucial during the terrorist's transition from the first to the second phase of the protracted popular warfare (PPW). When the terrorists began to concentrate forces in order to attack and seize rural town police bases or isolated army or marines platoons, these intelligence assets were able to detect their concentration of forces. Once the concentrations of terrorists were identified, they were attacked and dispersed or destroyed, thus thwarting the achievement of their objectives. This critical capability forced them move back to the PPW first phase.

Another important capability to analyze is man power. The army increased its structure not only in number but in quality and experience. One change that significantly improved the military capability of the military forces was the recruitment of volunteer soldiers and reduction of draft high school graduated soldiers. In 1998, 61 percent of the

Army soldiers were high school draftees. Only 39 percent were volunteers. On 2002, the Army began its restructuring and by 2004, 98 percent were volunteers. In raw numbers, volunteer soldiers increased from 22,000 in 1998 to 72,000 in 2006. This increase gave the force the capability to occupy larger areas and conduct active area control military operations, thus allowing consolidation and security after offensive operations.

Furthermore, with more volunteer soldiers, the Army was able to increase their end strength. Draft soldiers have a commitment of 18 (high school graduates) to 24 months (non-high school graduates). Of those 24 months, six were for basic and counter guerrilla training and the last two for preparation prior to returning to a civilian status. This meant that a draft soldier's experience was only 13 or 19 months and then he was out of the army. Conversely, the terrorist combatants had many years of experience. Today, volunteer soldiers have gained a large experience in counter guerrilla warfare. This experience gives the Army an enhanced capacity to conduct effective offensive operations.

Soldiers from the "my town" program also improved the military capability of consolidating areas and protecting the civilian population. There are currently 562 soldiers in my town platoons (C. Army 2009). These platoons are composed of soldiers originally from each town or region. The main mission for this type of unit is to protect their respective town in cooperation with the national police forces established in those towns. They cannot be used to conduct operations farther than five kilometers away from their home base. These units have the complete support of the regional citizens because they all are relatives. The soldiers of my town are very effective because they know the population in the region; therefore, if an outsider attempts to infiltrate the region they will

notice him and alert the other army and police units in order to conduct intelligence or offensive operations. Also, these soldiers know the terrain very well. When Army counter guerrilla units are conducting offensive operations nearby, they are able to provide guides and serve as combat enablers.

Another capability very important to this military analysis is training levels. Colombian Army forces have a very high level of training for counter guerrilla operations. This is even more noticeable in the special operations forces (SOF). SOF units have gained a very high level of training and capabilities. Before the year 2002, it was almost impossible to target terrorist organization's leadership. With improved training, SOF units have conducted deep operations that have ended with the killing of members of the FARC-EP secretariat, such as Raul Reyes (FARC-EP Second in Command).

The army commander has divided Colombia in different zones identified with colors according to the threat. Red zones are considered to be the most dangerous areas with the highest threat capability. Yellow zones are mid level threat where offensive operations have been successful and the consolidation phase is beginning. Green zones are the less dangerous zones; in these zones the army has already began successfully consolidation operations. According to this distribution, the army has determined the percentage of volunteer and drafted soldiers. For example, red zones are volunteer soldier heavy with approximately 90 to 100percent volunteers. The yellow zones have approximately 50 percent of both volunteer and drafted soldiers. And finally, the green zones are more focused on drafted soldiers but still have approximately 20 percent volunteer soldiers to conduct offensive operations when needed.

The military variable of conflict has been determined by the use of Mao's protracted popular warfare (PPW). The FARC-EP, in its earlier stages, conducted the first phase of this warfare, strategic defensive and implantation. The economic influence of the narcotics trafficking economy allowed them to grow in personnel and equipment. Once they reached a high level of equipment, they transitioned to the second phase: strategic balance of forces. This change was very important for the Colombian military forces development. As depicted in Chapter One, a key element to making an adequate change of phase is to conceal such change from the. At the beginning of the FARC-EP's second PPW phase, Colombian military forces did not notice the change and continued to conduct small unit operations against small size enemy elements. In the late 1990s, the army and marines suffered several defeats on the battlefield. About 400 military and police personnel were kidnapped and around 200 assassinated by the FARC-EP.

This defeat on the battlefield influenced today's military changes. Colombian military forces began rapid development of capabilities to include doctrinal changes, equipment, man power and operational concepts. The army aviation and air force began to conduct night operations and interdictions of terrorists' concentrations. Counter guerrilla and SOF units became more flexible and better trained. Offensive operations began to be conducted by larger military units with better air support. These changes, and the ones described before, prevented the FARC-EP from moving into the next PPW phase: strategic offensive. Instead of moving forward, FARC-EP had to move back to the initial phase because they were no longer capable of confronting Army forces. Today their tactics are based on terrorism against population and infrastructure as a showing

force method. Against Army forces, their tactics are focused on harassing activities to make forces react and on the employment of indiscriminate anti personal mine fields.

The AUC (Colombia United Self defense groups) was also a very influential element of the military variable in the conflict. It was born as a legitimate right of the civilian population to defend themselves from the guerrilla movements. At the beginning the farmers employed the united self defense groups (AUC) in the far rural areas where the Colombian government could not reach them with conventional forces. Later, in order to be able to support their defense, the AUC began to get involved in drug trafficking. Once involved in illegal trafficking, they began to employ terrorist actions against the guerrilla forces, such as massacres and violent assassination, sometimes involving non-combatant civilian population. After these dramatic changes of objectives and tactics, the AUC became illegal and were considered another terrorist organization. The government began to attack them as well as the left wing terrorist organizations. They were a destabilizing element in the conflict because they focus their actions against the FARC-EP and ELN by employing their same tactics. Even though they never conducted a direct attack against government forces unless defending themselves, they began to involve different areas of the Colombian society including military and police members.

### Economic

The economic variable encompasses individual and group behaviors related to producing, distributing, and consuming resources (FM 3-0 2008, 1-8). In the beginning of the conflict, the FARC-EP economy was based on external support. They relied on the world's communist countries or organizations to support with funds in order to launch their armed revolution. In the late 1980s, after the collapse of some communist

organizations and lack of enough external support, they began to deal with narcotics producing and trafficking. This new economic source gave them the capability to rapidly grow in force and equipment. To complement this source, they also continued to conduct kidnapping and extortions against the civilian population. Terrorism and assassination of innocent civilians was their method to influence the population to pay the extortions and to pay for release of those kidnapped. The FARC-EP traded drugs directly for weapons and ammunitions. This was possible because of Colombia's porous borders. To destroy this FARC-EP power source, the Colombian government began a strong strategy to attack their economy center of gravity, drugs. Plan Colombia has been the most important element to achieve today's results in counter drug warfare. After the agreement began, the production and trafficking of narcotics decreased. The FARC-EP's capability has also decreased due to tighter control of Columbia's air space and the borders.

In Colombia, the economy has increased from 1.95 GDP in 2002 to 6.8 in 2007 (C. M. Defense 2007) and the international investment has grown from \$1.6 million in 2002 to \$8.7 million in 2007 (figure 3). This level of growth in Colombian economy shows very clearly that terrorist threats are responsible of bringing poverty to Colombia and of limiting its development.



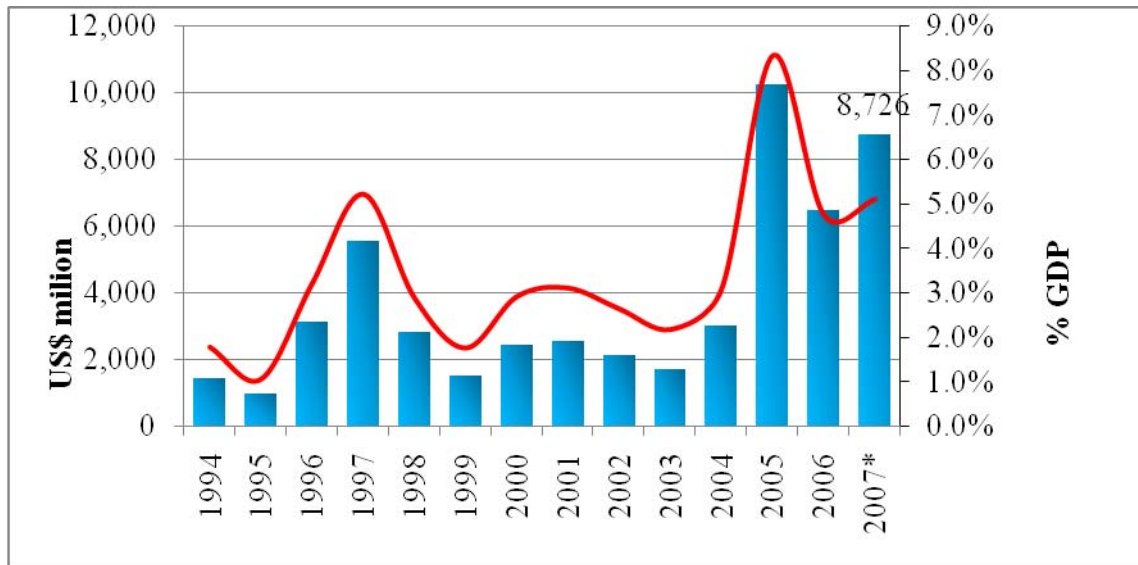


Figure 3. International Investment

Source: Ministry of Defense, Policy for the Consolidation of the Democratic Security (C. M. Defense 2009, Slide 18).

### Social

The social variable describes societies within an operational environment. A society is a population whose members are subject to the same political authority, occupy a common territory, have a common culture, and share a sense of identity (FM 3-0 2008, 1-7). The beginning of the FARC-EP's history as a subversive movement began with population support. As a subversive movement with Maoist ideals, one of its primary objectives was the equality of social classes. This ideology helped them to grow in man power, because it was attractive to most farmers who were looking for such equality. Many more joined the ELN and the right wing AUC. After beginning the production and trafficking of illegal crops, all the terrorist organizations began to involve civilian population in the conflict. They began to conduct deliberate attacks against rural towns

accusing the population of supporting the opposite terrorist group. If the FARC-EP or ELN conducted a massacre, they usually justified this action by saying that the assassinated people were supporters of the AUC or the legitimate military forces. If the AUC were the ones that conducted the massacre, they justified it by saying that the victims were supporting the FARC-EP or ELN. After this civilian population involvement by the terrorist organizations, they lost all support of the common Colombian citizen. Today, if somebody supports the terrorist groups, it's mostly likely because of economic influence or the threatening of their members to staying to avoid the assassination of their families.

Today the terrorist organizations have no support of the Colombian population while the military has been established as the most trusted institution in Colombia, being the first in national polls (Revista Semana 2008). The military forces have been maintaining this positive credibility because of their ability to bring security to almost all the regions of Colombia. This has allowed social investment by government and private companies. The poverty rate has decreased from 55.7 percent of the population in 2002 to 45.1 percent in 2007, the lowest in the last two decades (C. M. Defense 2009). The economic growth has been rising while the insecurity perception has dropped (figure 4). This variation of the security and economic development has allowed the government to establish different programs to ensure that population basic needs are met.



Figure 4. Economic Growth and Insecurity Perception

Source: Ministry of Defense, Policy for the consolidation of the democratic security (C. M. Defense 2009, Slide16).

### Information

Information environment is the aggregate of individuals, organizations, and systems that collect, process, disseminate, or act on information. The environment shaped by information includes leaders, decision makers, individuals, and organizations. The global community's access and use of data, media, and knowledge systems occurs in the information shaped by the operational environment (FM 3-0 2008, 1-8). Terrorist groups conducted very effective international information warfare. They employ different communication systems, especially the internet. Today, it is possible to see many organizations and even governments that support these terrorist organizations with money, ideology or providing secure heavens to protect FARC-EP leaders from military forces' actions. This has generated different international incidents, such as the recent

breaking of diplomatic relations with Ecuador after the assault of a well-guarded guerrilla camp in that country that ended with the killing of the FARC-EP's second-in-command. But this is not new, when the FARC-EP was in the second phase of the PPW, they would frequently establish road blocks in different rural areas in Colombia. They used the media to show the population that they were able to control roads despite the military operations. This generated panic in the population and many did not travel by vehicle to their farms or for vacations because of the fear of being kidnapped. In the rural areas, they employed many tactical radio stations to broadcast their information and influence in the population's beliefs.

The government, to include its military forces, has subsequently increased its ability to reach the population. The president has been conducting communitarian councils every weekend since his appointment. These councils are held in different rural areas with the presence of the president and some of his ministers and the military and police regional commanders. In these councils, the president listens to all the needs and special situations directly from the population and their local leaders. Also, the president explains the current and future programs for the region. This program has helped to reduce the rural area's needs and has created a direct communication channel between the population and the president.

### Infrastructure and Physical Environment

Infrastructure comprises the basic facilities, services, and installations needed for a society's functioning and physical environment includes the geography and man-made structures in the operational area (FM 3-0 2008, 1-8). The FARC-EP and ELN have used the national infrastructure and physical environment as a weapon. They have focused

their actions on destroying different assets to make the government invest valuable resources toward repair of infrastructure rather than in military support. The ELN has focused their terrorist actions on oil pipelines while the FARC-EP has oriented their activities against electrical network towers. Attack against these important energy networks involves not only the destroying of the infrastructure but also the indiscriminate use of anti-personal mine fields to delay repairs. These delays cause rural population the effects of not having electrical power for the daily needs and the increase of food and transportation because the rise of oil prices.

To deal with this problem, the army's growth and employment of technology have been decisive. Military and police forces have been able to control most of the main infrastructure. The roads have been assigned to different units who are dedicated only to the protection of this network, while counter guerrilla units conduct offensive operations. These units are trained and equipped to conduct exclusively this task. One of the most important units is the Army unit assigned to the Plan Meteoro. This plan consists of flexible military equipment such as motorcycles, armored vehicles and some civilian vehicles that constantly patrol Colombian road networks. Other special units are the energy and road network plan battalions. These units are assigned different networks such as roads, electric grids and pipelines. Their main mission is to protect these critical networks in the same manner as in Plan Meteoro. With the implementation of these plans and programs, the government achieved a very high sense of security among the population and the international community. Today, people travel Colombian roads with more confidence. Because of this confidence, the economy has also developed, especially in tourism and private investment.

## Time

Time is a significant consideration in military operations. Analyzing it as an operational variable focuses on how an operation's duration might help or hinder each side. (FM 3-0 2008, 1-8). As outlined in first chapter, Colombian terrorist organizations fight according to Mao's Protracted Popular Warfare (PPW). In this operational environment, time is on the side of insurgent movements. They understand that they can survive for decades if they do not directly confront the governmental forces. The Colombian conflict is a clear example of this PPW because it has been going on since 1949. The terrorist organizations not only focus on the armed confrontation, but they are also developing communist and socialist political parties that are currently growing in Colombia. In order to achieve a complete victory, they know they need enough time to develop those political parties, and gain the population support under a false peace statement.

The Colombian presidential term limit was four years. This means that every four years the government developed a policy to neutralize the threat and implemented new initiatives for peace and economic growth. As the government began to gain traction with their policies, their term ended. Unlike in the United States, they could not be elected for a second term. However, as recently approved by the Colombian Congress, President Alvaro Uribe is the first in modern history to be president for two consecutive terms. Serving in the presidency for a longer time has allowed Alvaro Uribe to develop his policy and implement it with great results in the fight against terrorism, corruption and poverty.

At the operational level, Colombian army units used to conduct offensive operations and after accomplishing the mission, return to their initial location. They did this out of necessity because it was very difficult to sustain deep prolonged operations especially in supplies, air support and communications. When short operations were conducted, the population did not support the military forces because they knew that after the military forces left the region, the terrorist organizations would return and execute those who had supported the military forces. Military development has allowed the Army and Marines to conduct deep and prolonged operations being able to conduct consolidation operations. These consolidation operations are focused on restoring governance where affected, fostering regional development and gaining population confidence in the army.

Furthermore, the military's deep and prolonged operations have weakened the ability of terrorist groups to conduct large attacks on Army or Marine units. With these deep operations, the leaders at all levels have been isolated from the remaining of the structures causing a command and control weakness that has been exploited by the government as in the operation Jacque. This isolation allowed the execution of important operations such as the most recent strategic operation, Operation Jacque. The leader in charge of the hostages and the organization leaders had spent a long time without being able to have direct communication. Any communication conducted by these structures was based on vulnerable and sporadic radio contact. Exploiting this vulnerability, army intelligence intercepted the communications and began the operation as described in Chapter One.

After analyzing how operational variables have influenced Colombia by the different elements of conflict, it is clear how the Colombian government and its military and police forces have achieved today's capabilities for bringing a more secure country to their citizens and the international community while improving the economy and life standards. Chapter Five will offer the conclusions of the analysis of all the information presented in this chapter and will establish some recommendations for future readers of this thesis. It will also answer the thesis primary research question: Could the irregular warfare strategies and operational concepts that Colombia currently practices be useful in other scenarios?



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Conclusions

Chapter 4 analyzed the information gathered on counterinsurgency operations. The following chapter provides conclusions based upon the author's personal understanding of the conflict in Colombia and his direct experience in conducting counterinsurgency operations in the country. Other individuals may draw slightly different conclusions based on their operational experience, posting locations, and organizational culture and doctrine. The importance of this body work is that it clearly answers the primary research question: "Could the irregular warfare strategies and operational concepts that the Colombia military currently implements be useful in other counterinsurgency scenarios? The answer is yes. The conclusions drawn in this chapter will provide supporting material for this position.

#### Political Dimensions

Insurgent or terrorist movements, depending on the ideology, need political legitimacy to support their violent activities and achieve their objectives. This legitimacy allows them to mobilize the internal population while at the same building alliances and sympathies with political groups, external organizations and third party countries. In Colombia, the Clandestine Colombian Communist Party (CCCP) provided this political force (Liberation 2004, 01). If insurgencies only focus on armed activities and fail to develop a political organization, they are increasingly likely to fail in attaining their

strategic objective, and the overthrow and replacement of the current political authority (FM 3-24 2006, G5).

As an example, in Colombia, contemporary groups like the FARC-EP used to base their actions in accordance with traditional insurgent principles of gaining people support. Today these groups use indiscriminate force, focusing on kidnappings, extra-judicial killings, car bombings and sabotage, directly against civilians and physical infrastructure losing day-by-day that important popular support for any insurgent movement. They seek to coerce compliance through fear rather than winning the support of the population through political mobilization. They use the political cover afforded to them by sympathetic politicians, third party organizations and external governments to legitimize their operations. This requires that national institutions and the international community re-evaluate their perceptions of these groups, considering them criminals or terrorists rather than legitimate political movements.

Another observed political trend in this type of warfare is the insurgents' focus on judicial vendettas. By manipulating judicial institutions in-country and internationally, the FARC-EP has successfully sought out the prosecution of security officials and political opponents. This tactic is used to demoralize counter-insurgents and de-legitimize the actions of the governing authority. This tactic acts as a rear guard operations with a goal to attack the political legitimacy of the government and the professionalism of the security forces, attempting to weaken the resolve of the government in the prosecution of its counterinsurgent campaign.

The most important observed variable to reduce these types of organizations lies at the strategic level. It is the commitment of the government to maintain the commitment and support to the counterinsurgent campaign in all levels. As an example, the Colombian president's democratic security policy has been the decisive instrument that has weakened the FARC more over the last eight years than at any previous time over the 40 years of conflict. The consistent application of democratic security policy throughout the last eight years has weakened support in both the local and international political environments. The Colombian government has been able to re- shape the perception of key nations like the United States and European Union members to properly categorize groups like the FARC as terrorist organizations. Concurrently, the Colombian government has been able to win the support of the majority of the population against these organizations. This has effectively isolated them, removing national and international legitimacy. Today, these counter-government organizations do not have a reverberating political platform or the military capability to threaten the government. Proof of the rejectionist attitude towards these organizations can readily be observed at the many protests that have taken place in country against the FARC-EP and similar organizations. In the end, these groups are forced to resort to criminal actions using terrorism and subversion to remain relevant.

Clear political objectives, coupled with resolve and government re-organization are the strategic pillars for a focused and successful counterinsurgency strategy to politically neutralize these types of organizations. Limiting the insurgent's ability to manipulate the judiciary enables military forces to conduct counter-insurgency/counter terrorist operations with audacity is an important element in this type of warfare.

Similarly, the government must win the trust and confidence of the population in this type of warfare. In Colombia, , the security forces, have strictly mandated and enforced the application of human rights in operations in order to bolster their legitimacy and that of the government in the eyes of the population.

### Military Dimension

Military strategies and tactics are dynamic. The rival who is more agile and flexible will maintain an advantage over his opponent in this type of warfare. Terrorist groups actively look for trends and opportunities to exploit. In Colombia, the FARC-EP and ELN, influenced by Maoist ideology, followed the insurgency model described in his Mao's book, *Protracted Popular Warfare* (PPW). The FARC-EP transitioned from one phase to another, hiding these dynamic changes from Colombian conventional forces to achieve operational surprise. They changed from a first phase "strategic defensive" posture to second phase "strategic stalemate" and began to making preparations for a "strategic counteroffensive" in the late 1990s without clear detection by military forces. This agility gave them an important strategic advantage over the military.

When the military forces regained the initiative, the FARC transitioned back to phase I operations, fighting guerrilla warfare in order to preserve combat power. During this phase, combat elements avoided direct engagements unless they identified vulnerability in the opposing military and police force elements.

In turn, Colombian military forces re-organized themselves from a heavy static force to a light and flexible force. The army created 20 mobile brigades that were able to deploy anywhere in Colombia. These brigades had their staffs, but were logistically supported by the territorial brigades in the area of operations. Also, there was an

increment in the army aviation capability to transport personnel in combat areas because of the acquisition of more than 20 new UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters. These new capabilities gave the military forces the capability to deploy faster to any part of the territory to neutralize the terrorist organization units or to reinforce military units under heavy attack.

Technology has been a crucial if not the decisive element to achieve today's operational and strategic victories. Counterinsurgency needs a focus on ground forces to develop operations. Those forces need intelligence and support to conduct the operations; here is where technology plays an important role. When the FARC-EP transitioned to second and third phase insurgent operations, they had to concentrate large forces, in some cases more than a 1000 men, to conduct their assaults on towns or security forces. The advance in technology, especially in airborne intelligence platforms, allowed counterinsurgent forces to find and fix these concentrated elements, allowing combat forces to finish them, causing significant casualties. Enhanced night vision capability for army aviation and air force elements, allowed military forces to conduct night operations all over the territory achieving operational surprise and security.

Military intelligence plays a decisive role in this type of warfare. Military intelligence personnel have evolved and acquired the capacity to execute operations independently from combat forces. One of the best examples of how military intelligence capacity must be exploited is Operation "Jaque". This was a military intelligence operation that was planned and executed without the employment of combat forces as the main effort. This new capacity allowed government forces to rescue high value

individuals and strike a significant strategic blow against the FARC with limited bloodshed.

The development of a highly professional special operations forces (SOF) is another important capability that has achieved decisive momentum against enemy forces. These forces have provided the government the capacity to infiltrate small elements deep into previously denied terrain and locate terrorist leadership nodes and other objectives. These forces have also provided the government the capability \ to conduct limited offensive operations in order to neutralize strategic targets.

### Economic

Terrorist groups in Colombia draw their economic resources from illegal sources. In the beginning, these groups were supported by an international network of communist governments trying to implement their ideology in Latin-America. Because of the collapse of some of the sponsors, these groups began to look for other sources of income. Narco trafficking, extortion and kidnapping were the most profitable means to gain the economic resources necessary to sustain the movements.

In Colombia today, the center of gravity (COG) is the financial system. When organizations like the FARC lose the capability to equip and resupply their personnel, the structures begin to break down. Loyalty is lost and desertion rates increase. Without viable economic resources, they are unable to sustain their operations. In Colombia, attacking the terrorist's economy system has weakened more the terrorist organization than killing some of their members. For example by limiting the ability to supply food and control the populated areas, many terrorists have demobilized looking for the government's support.

Increasing the military and police manpower and equipping them with the latest technology coupled with better air support has been a decisive policy initiative for the Colombian government. It required a large investment from the government; however, this was an investment in security that had the tangential effect of restoring investor confidence in Colombia, helping the economy grow.

Active military operations to control previously surrendered regions of the country have increased the population's sense of security. The presence of military and police forces in most of the road and economic networks has increased the civilian's confidence to travel in the country. This confidence has helped re-establish the small industry economic base as more people invest in rural area development, tourism and cattle farming, sectors previously deemed too risky based on the security situation .

International investments have also increased in Colombia. The international investments have allowed the government to increase social programs to raise the living standards of the population. A total of US \$10.564 million was invested in 2008. The highest investments were oil companies (34 percent), mine production (20 percent) and manufacture activities (13 percent).

The rural area economy, previously affected by illegal crops, has been re-developed with several programs. Using a mix of eradication and substitution programs and alternative economic systems has taken root in rural regions of the country. . The programs like the Forest Ranger Families have motivated farmers to eradicate illegal crops. In this program, economic subsidies are given to families that maintain an illegal free environment. The government's idea is to motivate the farmer to grow conventional and legal products avoiding the influence of drug traffickers.

### Social

Populations are the foundations of all insurgent movements. Mao Tse Tung noted that the population is to the guerrilla as water to the fish. This basic principle of insurgent movements was well-used by Colombian movements. When they were unable to directly confront the security forces, they began to conduct indiscriminate terrorist actions as a show of force mechanism. By conducting these terrorist activities, they lost popular support. Isolation of the population from an insurgent group is essential. The population must not only be physically separated from insurgent agents but must also be cognitively detached from the movement. Hence, counterinsurgency campaigns must intertwine a strong social component to gain population support. Along with security, basic needs and economic development programs must be introduced in order to attack some of the root causes of popular discontent.

### Information

Subversive organizations primary focus on de-legitimizing the constitutional government. One of the most actively used tools is propaganda. These types of campaigns focus on manipulating the sentiment of the target population against the ruling authority. It is not about telling the truth; it is about telling their slant of events. Their political supporters in the urban centers begin media campaigns in order to de-legitimize the government institutions in the eyes of the international and regional communities. They also focus their campaigns in rural areas where the state has limited capacity to contest due to distances and lack of communication networks.

The Colombian government has focused on competing in this domain. They have actively conducted information operations to reach all sectors of the local population,



both in the urban center and rural areas. Communications with the rural areas has been improved with technology using tactical radio stations to link these areas with the government. The military employs tactical radio stations to transmit educational and information programs. With these means, the military also updates the rural population with the latest government programs, as well as, provides updates on FARC activities and their effects on national economy.

### Infrastructure and Physical Environment

Terrorist organizations conduct attacks against national infrastructure and the physical environment. With these attacks, terrorist groups try to show force when unable to directly attack military or police forces. Terrorists also use these attacks against the infrastructure to isolate the population from creating an economic or social crisis. They bring a sense of insecurity among the population. On January 27, 2002, the FARC, in order to force the government to conduct peace dialogues on their terms, conducted three simultaneous terrorist attacks on populations in the south of Colombia. At the same time, they destroyed a bridge that communicates a rural town called Valparaiso with the capital.

Another goal of these attacks is to force the government to expend limited national resources on reconstruction of infrastructure rather than in the military equipment or training or in any social component. By doing this, the FARC wants to make population believe that the government is using all of the budget to finance the war instead in solving population needs.

Active military control operations of key infrastructure is crucial in mitigating these types of de-stabilizing operations. This focus forces government security elements

to control and protect most of the national infrastructure (roads, bridges, oil pipe lines) and the population's basic facilities (electric towers, hydroelectric installations). Controlling these key infrastructures, roads and river networks further isolate the terrorists. By denying terrorists the access to these networks, these groups are forced deeper into jungle or mountains to maintain an adequate amount of freedom of movement and action. This keeps terrorist groups away from the vast majority of the population, allowing military forces to conduct offensive operations with little to no collateral damage. This helps bring a sense of security and stability to the population and protects national resources while further isolating the terrorist's elements.

### Time

Insurgent groups do not depend on time. As stated before, insurgent, guerrilla or terrorist organizations that follow Mao's Protracted Popular Warfare (PPW) are not limited by time to achieve their goals. Since insurgent groups do not have the military power and resources to directly take on a government, they need to be patient and identify opportunities that allow them to execute effective operations at little cost to their limited resources. They try to work both the armed and the political wings of an insurgency. And it takes a long time to build a strong and effective political wing that influences a government.

Government forces are influenced more by time during the counterinsurgency operation. There are many variables and they are exploited by the insurgents or terrorist groups. Some but not all the variables are: population support, budget, leader term limits.

In order to achieve a “real” victory against an insurgent or terrorist group, a government and military forces must be prepared for a long and demanding (money and lives) war.

### Final Conclusion

The final conclusion of this thesis is the answer to the primary research question depicted in chapter one: Could irregular warfare strategies and operational concepts that Colombia currently practices be useful in other scenarios? The answer to this question is unequivocally “yes”. Almost all insurgent, guerrilla or terrorist groups, according to the point of view and category given to these kinds of organizations by different governments, has similar phases, principles or operational concepts. Therefore, if a strategy or operational concept depicted in this thesis has helped the Colombian government security forces to achieve strategic victories against the threats, it could be employed in different scenarios worldwide.

### Recommendations

Internally, a government under attack must uphold its commitment at all levels (national, provincial, and local) in supporting a campaign that balances the military effort to neutralize the tangible threats in its conflict while simultaneously developing social and economic programs to reach a long standing peace.

Governments must use all available assets. This includes the national police. There are some roles the police can execute to support a military component. While police forces protect population and infrastructures, the army could focus on offensive operations. It could be done better if the police is under control of the ministry of defense.

Diplomacy and common international understanding of the threat is important. The commitment and support of regional countries are necessary to achieve the cumulative effects required to defeat similar subversive organizations worldwide. These organizations must be devoid of sanctuary locations, political support and material resources in order to fatally weaken the organizations.

Officers and non-commissioned officers who will be assigned to a unit involved in counter insurgency or counter terrorism operations must be educated and trained in counter-insurgency doctrine, best practices, and lessons learned from this body work and others in order to have the broad-based knowledge of necessary to design and implement creative and effective solutions to the individual problems/conditions that they face.

It is absolutely necessary that soldiers research and understand the operational and human environment in which their counterinsurgency campaign is taking place. Historical, social, economic, military, and political evolution of the area of operations, as well as, the physical terrain must be thoroughly understood to increase understanding of the context in which operations and campaigns are taking place, ensuring that effective solutions are being implemented.

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